

TOWN MANAGER

Fiscal Year 2013

I preface my report once again by acknowledging that the progress we are making is largely the result of the tremendous skill, dedication, and work ethic each and every Town employee brings to their everyday work in our collective efforts to be leaders in everything we do. I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that the overall caliber of Town employees at all levels is as good as it has ever been in the modern history of the Town. This is a continuing source of pride to me as their Town Manager.

Listed below are what I believe are the key highlights and accomplishments over the past year, fully cognizant of the fact that many of these would not have been achieved without the skill and dedication of the Town staff, the ongoing support and encouragement of the Select Board, and the input from and support of Town Meeting members, the hundreds of community volunteers on Town boards and committees, and the community at large.

- The Town's financial planning represents an ongoing commitment to fiscal sustainability in a multi-year context. Town services are being maintained and we are making adjustments to deliver services more efficiently and effectively to produce excellent public services for the Town's residents. It is possible to maintain services because of the work we have done over the year to control health insurance, employee compensation, and energy costs.
- In July 2012, the Town achieved designation as a Green Community by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, giving us access to grant funding to support energy savings initiatives. We were awarded our first state grant under this program, for \$302,000, for installation of LED energy-efficient streetlights.
- The successful transfer of over 200 retired school employees from the state GIC health insurance plans to the Town's self-insured health plans was completed effective October 1 and is resulting in monthly savings to most retirees and savings of over \$100,000 annually to the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District and Amherst Public Schools.
- A reorganized Inspection Services Department, with new leadership provided by my hiring in 2012 of Building Commissioner Rob Morra, improved joint inspection procedures with the Health and Fire Departments, increased efficiency within Inspection Services resulting in staff availability and quick permit issuance, and now regularly communicates with all Conservation and Development staff to provide a clear and concise permitting path to all applicants.
- Zoning and land use changes designed to encourage in-fill development in existing village centers were adopted at the 2013 Annual Town Meeting (Articles 30 - 36) that inspired a June 12 Amherst Bulletin editorial titled "Town Meeting Breaks Logjam on Creative Zoning."
- Town IT staff designed and installed the largest and fastest open downtown outdoor WiFi network in Massachusetts using an in-house custom-built solution at half the cost of the largest leading company's much less robust solutions.
- In January, the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) selected the Town's website www.amherstma.gov as one of only six municipal websites in the Commonwealth to receive its annual Municipal Website Award. Our award-winning website is one of the clearest examples of the progress we are making on our Open Government to the Max

initiative. I am proud of the simplicity, the many unique and forward-thinking features, and the functionality offered by the Town website to both visitors and residents. The site achieved another significant growth year for unique daily visitors, an 18% increase over last year.

- A top priority established by the Select Board for my attention was to take steps to make real progress in what I have called our Safe & Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative. This resulted in the adoption of a rental regulations and permitting system at the Annual Town Meeting.
- Joint police patrols were started in fall 2012 with the UMass Police Department in neighborhoods near the university with particular attention to the Fearing and Phillips streets neighborhood and the North Amherst area. The two departments are also seeking to collaborate more fully on officer training. I convinced UMass to fund two additional detail ambulances on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights from 9 pm – 7 am for the seven busiest spring weekends in April – May to make sure there were a sufficient number of ambulances available to meet the entire Town's needs.
- An audit of existing Human Resources policies and practices engaged staff in all departments. It identified a need to develop and implement standard Town-wide processes for recruitment, orientation, exit, performance management and professional development. The key points identified will serve as a roadmap for further improvements in our human resources function over the next two years.
- I am actively working with staff, the Town's Housing and Sheltering Committee, the Amherst Housing Authority, and the Massachusetts Housing Partnership to investigate options to preserve affordability at Rolling Green, a 204-unit development on Belchertown Road, and the nearby 24-unit Echo Village Apartments. I have met with the owners of both properties and they have committed to participate in this exploration of options and possibly negotiate if/when appropriate.
- A Housing Production Plan focused on affordable housing needs (completed) and a Housing Market Needs Study (draft report received and presented to the community) are efforts to develop a data-driven approach to meet our affordable housing, rental (family and student), and other housing needs by engaging the Amherst community and drawing upon the expertise of other communities' experiences.
- Rehabilitation and reopening of the War Memorial Pool at Community Field was made possible last July with the help of a \$208,000 state grant and unanimous vote for funding by Town Meeting.
- This spring we have launched an ambitious plan headed by our Massachusetts State Tree Warden of the Year Alan Snow to plant 2,000 trees over three years to reduce pollution, beautify our community, and reverse a twenty-plus year trend of net loss of hundreds of street trees.

Respectfully submitted,

John Musante
Town Manager